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Every language has its laws – Rhetoricians and the study of the Dutch vernacular

ALISA VAN DE HAAR

Ist niet hóóghlyck te verwonderen [dat] onze alghemene Duytsche taal [...] zó zwackelyck opghehulpen ende zó wainigh met gheleerdheyd verryckt ende verciert word: tót een jammerlyck hinder ende nadeel des vólcx.¹

[Is it not very surprising [that] our common Dutch language [...] is being supported so weakly and is being so little enriched and adorned with learning: to the regretful impediment and disadvantage of the people.]²

These are the opening words of the famous *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst*, the first printed grammar of the Dutch language.³ It was published in Leiden in 1584, on behalf of the Amsterdam chamber of rhetoric *De Eglantier* [The Eglantine], and had probably been written by Hendrik Laurensz Spiegel.⁴ In the dedicatory epistle to the city council of Amsterdam quoted here, it is strongly implied that the Dutch vernacular had received hardly any attention from the learned men that spoke it. Dutch was far behind other languages of Europe because it had not been treated as an object of study. However, this was about to change, as *De Eglantier* initiated its scheme for a set of *trivium* treatises especially for the Dutch language, starting with the *Twe-spraack*, a grammar, and followed by works on dialectic and rhetoric.

The members of *De Eglantier* clearly wished to present their *Twe-spraack* as being innovative for the Dutch vernacular. Rather than following in the footsteps of earlier rhetoricians, they wished to associate themselves with the ‘scholarly habitus’, in which language had become an important topic of enquiry in

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¹ *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst, ofte uant spellen ende eyghenscap des Nederduitschen taals* (Leiden: Christoffel Plantyn, 1584), fol. A2r.

² All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

³ In this period, no standardised form of Dutch existed. It was made up of a variety of different dialects that were part of the Low German language continuum. In this article, the term Dutch will be used to refer to the variants that were spoken in the whole of the Seventeen Provinces.

⁴ Geert Dibbets, *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst* (1584) (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 23–5.

the sixteenth century.⁵ In scholarly environments, Latin treatises were published that dealt with language change and classification. Various professors at the newly founded university of Leiden, such as Franciscus Raphelengius and Josephus Justus Scaliger, wrote on the genealogy and comparison of languages.⁶ Attention to historical forms of language, the relationships between different languages, and the particular characteristics of each individual language was growing.

This attention no longer targeted Latin alone, which had a long tradition of study through the *trivium*. Scholars now also started to study other classical languages, such as Greek and Hebrew, exotic languages like Persian and the languages of the New World, and contemporary European vernaculars. Particular attention was paid to the *lingua Adamica*, the original language spoken in paradise.⁷ Although many scholars considered Hebrew to be the oldest language, the humanist Johannes Goropius Becanus argued that this title belonged to a Germanic tongue, namely the Dutch dialect spoken in Antwerp. He explained his theory on the old age of the Dutch language in a lengthy treatise published in Latin in 1569, the *Origines Antwerpianae*.⁸ Goropius Becanus closely studied this language to demonstrate what particular characteristics made it such a perfect language.

Following the example of these scholarly studies of language, *De Eglantier* would treat the Dutch vernacular as an object of study. The *Twe-spraak* suggests that until its publication, Dutch had only been treated by authors as a form of *ingenium*, a talent innate to the poet. Allegedly, the language had not been cultivated through *ars*, that is, through practice and study.⁹ It was a deliberate choice to create a vernacular *trivium*, traditionally destined for the description and instruction of the Latin language. Moreover, the only language debater mentioned in the dedication and preface is Goropius Becanus. While establishing links with the scholarly milieu in which languages in general and the Dutch

⁵ Gijsbert Rutten, 'Waarom verscheen de *Twe-Spraak* in 1584?', in T. Van Hal, L. Isebaert, and P. Swiggers (eds.), *De tuin der talen: Taalstudie en taalcultuur in de Lage Landen, 1450–1750* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 253–78, esp. 274.

⁶ See, for example, Scaliger's *Diatriba de Europaeorum linguis* (1610). Raphelengius wrote on the similarities between Dutch and Persian in his letters. Toon Van Hal, 'Moedertalen en taalmoeders': *Het vroegmoderne taalvergelijkende onderzoek in de Lage Landen* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 2010), 130–1.

⁷ Toon Van Hal, Lambert Isebaert, and Pierre Swiggers, 'Taaldiversiteit en taalfascinatie in de Renaissance: een inleiding tot, en rondleiding door, de "tuin der talen"', in Van Hal, Isebaert, and Swiggers (eds.), *De tuin der talen*, vii–xxiii; Toon Van Hal, Lambert Isebaert, and Pierre Swiggers, 'Het "vernieuwde" taal- en wereldbeeld van de vroegmoderne tijd. Bakens en referentiepunten', in *ibid.*, 3–48; Van Hal, 'Moedertalen en taalmoeders'.

⁸ *Twe-spraak*, fol. A2v. For more information on Becanus and his theory, see Johannes Goropius Becanus, *Van Adam tot Antwerpen: Een bloemlezing uit de Origines Antwerpianae en de Opera van Johannes Goropius Becanus*, trans. Nico de Glas (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014); and Eddy Frederickx and Toon Van Hal, *Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–1573): Brabants arts en taalfanaat* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2015).

⁹ Dibbets, *Twe-spraak*, 30; Bart Ramakers, 'As Many Lands, As Many Customs: Vernacular Self-Awareness Among the Netherlandish Rhetoricians', in J. P. Keizer and T. M. Richardson (eds.), *The Transformation of Vernacular Expression in Early Modern Arts* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 123–77, esp. 136.

vernacular in particular had been discussed, the *Twe-spraak* distanced itself from earlier rhetoricians.

It is clear that members of *De Eglantier* made a great contribution to the history of the study of the Dutch vernacular. Their grammar was the first to be printed, and it presented a new vision on the spelling of the language and ways to enrich its vocabulary. Nevertheless, they were not the first to study the Dutch language and write about it in the vernacular. A lively culture of debate on language had been present in the Low Countries from the 1540s on, and perhaps even earlier, and it had involved rhetoricians as well. The *Twe-spraak* strongly built on previous local debates and interacted with discussions on language elsewhere in Europe.¹⁰

Rhetoricians played an important role in the study of the Dutch language well before the Amsterdam chamber published its *trivium*. Even though they did not state it explicitly, many rhetoricians were actually applying the notion of *ars* on the vernacular already.¹¹ These earlier contributions did not lead to purification and standardisation, two elements that have been considered key in the development of the Dutch language in this period. Their importance has therefore been largely overlooked by modern researchers of the history of Dutch.¹² This essay will counteract this neglect by focusing on the works of three earlier rhetoricians: Eduard de Dene, Matthijs de Castelein, and Jan van Mussem. Their contributions to the debates on the Dutch language will be connected with the observations and proposals of the *Twe-spraak* and the scholarly environment it wished to associate itself with, in order to demonstrate that the topics in which they were interested were sometimes very similar.

Rather than focusing on purification and standardisation, the earlier rhetoricians concentrated their efforts on discovering the possibilities and boundaries of the language and its particular characteristics that set it apart from other languages. These themes were also discussed in scholarly environments. However, studying these topics was not just a theoretical enterprise, but often came down to a more hands-on way of discovering the formal structure of a language by using it. The rhetoricians used the creation of poetry as a way of studying language. Based on their observations, these poets were also searching for ways to improve the language, but those ways did not always take the form of rejecting words from other languages or writing grammars.

¹⁰ Marco Prandoni, 'Il Parnaso dei Paesi Bassi. La poesia rinascimentale "moderna"', in J. Koch, F. Paris, M. Prandoni, and F. Terrenato (eds.), *Harba lori fa!: Percorsi di letteratura fiamminga e olandese* (Naples: Università degli Studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale', 2012), 163–79; Rutten, 'Waarom verscheen de *Twe-Spraak*'; Marco Prandoni, 'Vive la France, à bas la France! Contradictory Attitude Toward the Appropriation of French Cultural Elements in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century: The Forewords of "Modern" Poetry Collections', in B. Noak (ed.), *Wissenstransfer und Auctoritas in der frühneuzeitlichen niederländischsprachigen Literatur* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2014), 179–94.

¹¹ Ramakers, 'As Many Lands'.

¹² Lode Van den Branden, *Het streven naar verheerlijking, zuivering en opbouw van het Nederlands in de 16e eeuw* (Arnhem: Gijssbers & Van Loon, 1967).

The rhetoricians are known for their dense, mannerist style of writing, which can be considered as much a poetic exercise as a linguistic one. Through such poetry it was possible to map the boundaries of the Dutch language: in what ways could the language be bent and shaped while still conveying a clear meaning? The manner in which many rhetoricians studied this topic through their poetical experiments can be demonstrated using the works of Eduard de Dene, who took this phenomenon to almost extreme proportions. He was a *factor*, or leading poet, of the chamber of rhetoric *De Drie Santinnen* [The Three Female Saints] in Bruges, and he was a member of another local chamber, *De Heilige Geest* [The Holy Ghost].¹³ His most famous text is entitled *Testament Rhetoricael* (1562).¹⁴ It is a literary testament addressed to his fellow citizens of Bruges, both Dutch- and French-speaking.

The *Testament* shows a strong influence of the French satirical poet François Rabelais, who, like De Dene, was a true language artist, reshaping his words and sentences to create allusions and jokes.¹⁵ The text contains both French and Dutch poems and it makes use of code-switching, where the text switches from one language to another, and auto-translation, where the author gives a translation of his own work.¹⁶ Its Dutch verses bristle with loanwords from French. De Dene is also known for having written the verses of the first emblematic fable book in Dutch, *De Warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567). In this production, too, French influence on De Dene has been identified.¹⁷

The Rabelaisian language bending by De Dene is a clear example of how the faculties of the Dutch language could be explored through poetry. In his *Testament*, De Dene investigated whether the morphological caprices by the French poet Rabelais would also work in a meaningful way in Dutch.¹⁸ He stretches his language in various directions to create a text full of puns, becoming eventually

¹³ Dirk Coigneau, 'Een Brugse Villon of Rabelais?: Eduard de Dene en zijn *Testament Rhetoricael* (1561)', in Bart Ramakers (ed.), *Conformisten en rebellen: Rederijkerscultuur in de Nederlanden (1400–1650)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 198–211, esp. 199; Samuel Mareel, 'Performing the Dutch Rederijker Lyric: Eduard de Dene and his *Testament Rhetoricael* (1562)', *The Modern Language Review*, 108 (2013), 1199–220, esp. 1203.

¹⁴ References in this article are made to the modern edition of the manuscript: *Eduard de Dene, Testament rhetoricael*, ed. Werner Waterschoot and Dirk Coigneau, 3 vols. (Ghent: Koninklijke Soevereine Hoofdkamer van Rhetorica 'De Fonteyne', 1976–1980) [*Jaarboek 'De Fonteyne'*, 26, 28, and 30 (1976–1980)].

¹⁵ Dirk Geirnaert, 'Imitating Rabelais in Sixteenth-Century Flanders: The Case of Eduard de Dene', in Paul J. Smith (ed.), *Éditer et traduire Rabelais à travers les âges* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 66–100.

¹⁶ Paul J. Smith, 'Plurilinguisme et stratégie éditoriale à Anvers: Le cas de la fable emblématique', in Roland Béhar, Mercedes Blanco, and Jochen Hafner (eds.), *Villes à la croisée des langues (XVIe–XVIIe siècles): Palerme, Naples, Milan, Anvers et Hambourg* (Geneva: Droz, forthcoming).

¹⁷ Dirk Geirnaert and Paul J. Smith, 'Tussen fabel en embleem: *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567)', *Literatuur*, 9 (1992), 22–33, esp. 28; Dirk Geirnaert and Paul J. Smith, 'The Sources of the Emblematic Fable Book *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567)', in John Manning, Karel Porteman, and Marc van Vaeck (eds.), *The Emblem Tradition and the Low Countries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 23–38.

¹⁸ Coigneau, 'Een Brugse Villon', 205.

'a discourse on the (in)adequacy of language'.¹⁹ He experimented with the use of suffixes from other languages to create new words, but also with other processes in which neologisms could be formed. One of these was the creation of compounds, words made up of two already existing words, joined together to obtain a new word. De Dene thus created words like 'zieckzondich', which figures on the first page of the *Testament*. It is made up of the words 'zieck' [ill] and 'zondich' [sinful], to describe the morally ill.²⁰ His further experiments with the creation of neologisms led to words like 'duusternachtich' [dark-nightly] and 'godsvruchtvoysich' [piety-voiced].²¹ De Dene apparently found this method particularly useful for the creation of adjectives, using the suffix *-ich*.

Remarkably, this poetical exploration and study of the language is not far from the methods described in the *Twe-spraak*. There, too, compounding and suffixation were used to create neologisms and thus to fill gaps in the language, as becomes clear from the following list of examples:

[...] *wóórdhouwen, rederycken, redenkavelen, wóórdstapelen*, dat wy ghebruyken (op de kamer) zó wanneer by ons mede plaats vant rymsprecken Synonimia gheoeffent word. alzó machmen daghelycks na behoefte wóorden ende namen t'samen voeghen, om iet te betekenen dat wy anders niet zegghen konen.²²

[...] *word-carving, rhetoricising, reason-debating, word-compiling*, which we use (in the chamber) when we practise with synonyms instead of rhyme, so can one daily, at will, bring together words and names to refer to something that otherwise we could not say.]

The word 'rederycken' was a verb formed out of the noun 'rede' [reason], the adverb 'ryck' [rich] (together forming the compound 'rederyck', a neologism for rhetoric), and the verb-forming suffix *-en*. The term 'woordstapelen' is a compound made out of the noun 'woord' [word] and the verb 'stapelen' [compiling]. The members of *De Eglantier* experimented with such ways of creating neologisms during their meetings; De Dene did it in his poetry. Perhaps the members of the Amsterdam chamber stipulated their interest in this way of creating neologisms because of the important status of compounding in the theories formulated by Becanus. He considered the ability of the Dutch language to create new words by using this method one of its most valuable characteristics.²³ Nevertheless, rhetoricians like De Dene had already shown decades earlier how fruitful the technique was.

¹⁹ Arjan van Dixhoorn, 'The Multilingualism of Dutch Rhetoricians: Jan van den Dale's *Uure van den doot* (Brussels, c. 1516) and the Use of Language', in Jan Bloemendal (ed.), *Bilingual Europe: Latin and Vernacular Cultures, Examples of Bilingualism and Multilingualism c. 1300–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 50–72, esp. 64.

²⁰ De Dene, *Testament*, I, 8. See also the *Geïntegreerde Taalbank* for De Dene's use of this neologism. *Geïntegreerde Taalbank*, 'zieckzondig', <http://gtb.inl.nl>. (accessed February 2016).

²¹ 'duusternachtich': De Dene, *Testament*, I, 32; 'godsvruchtvoysich': *ibid.*, I, 59.

²² *Twe-spraak*, 92. See also Daniel Brink, 'The Linguistic Theories of Simon Stevin', *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*, 1 (1989), 133–52, esp. 141–2.

²³ Frederickx and Van Hal, *Johannes Goropius Becanus*, 127.

While the *Twe-spraak* wished to reinforce the boundaries between the French and Dutch tongues and prevent influence, De Dene was actively looking for these boundaries and playing with transgressing them through his bilingual poetry. He referred to one of his poems, which is full of loanwords, as a 'mixte theutonicque Balade' [a mixed Teutonic [Dutch] ballad].²⁴ How many French borrowings could the Dutch language incorporate while still being recognisable as Dutch and, perhaps more importantly, still being understandable? This question is implicitly posed in the following poem, which also bristles with loanwords:

- Wat Componiste, yet speculeirt
 ymaidgeineirt
 maect dicteirt, ofte fantazeirt
 preponeirt, sustineirt, Argueirt, solueirt
 5 *concludeirt*
 Tsamen gheRammelt int vulbrynghe!
 metter Dood, Wordet al ghepasseirt
 gheconsummeirt, Gheadnihileirt
 ghevilipendeirt, Ghesuppeditteirt
 10 Want zou es inne des weerelts omRynghen
 Dontbyndeghe, ende thende van allen dynghe[n] [...].²⁵
- [What composer speculates,
 Imagines
 Makes, dictates, or fantasises
 Proposes, sustains, argues, resolves
 5 Concludes
 Shaken together in completion!
 With death, it is all passed over
 Consumed, annihilated
 despised, suppressed
 10 Because it would in the world surround
 The disintegration, and the end of all things]

This poem contains almost as many loanwords as autochthone Dutch words. It actively explores the limits of the Dutch language and the amount of influence from other languages it could incorporate without becoming unreadable. Moreover, it is a demonstration of the eloquence that could be achieved by using borrowed terms. Through the two enumerations of verbs connected to poetic creation and destruction, De Dene shows how copious the Dutch language could become if it accepted the help offered by other tongues.

In another text in the *Testament*, De Dene goes even further by adopting the process of code-switching. De Dene transformed Clément Marot's poem 'Tant

²⁴ De Dene, *Testament*, II, 213.

²⁵ De Dene, *Testament*, I, 11.

que vivrai', which had been set to music by Claudin de Sermisy, into a bilingual text:

- Tant que viuray
 zo bem [sic] ick noch niet doodt
 le serviray
 tvaucken in hueren schoot
 5 iusques a tant
 dat huer buucxken word groot
 Par son playsir
 nam icxse by der handt
 pour mon desir
 [...]
 20 Par bon vouloir
 waeren wy vroylick daer
 gentil debuoir
 dede zou tmywaerts claer
 25 Fort Amoureux
 Toufde zou my voorwaer
 Le bon accoeul
 huers Lichaem gracieux
 tristresse doeul
 30 verough victorieux
 nous feismes bonne chiere
 met herten Coragieux
 Son alyanche *etc.*²⁶

- As long as I live
 I am not yet dead
 I will serve
 The maiden in her lap
 5 Until the moment
 That her belly inflates
 Pleasing her
 I took her by the hand
 For my desire
 [...]
 20 Out of goodwill
 We were cheerful there
 The nice task
 Performed, it was clear to me
 Much in love
 25 She rejected me truly
 The warm welcome
 Of her gracious body
 Sadness and grief

²⁶ De Dene, *Testament*, II, 198–200.

Chased victorious
 30 We were very kind
 With courageous hearts
 Her alliance, etc.]

While the beginning of De Dene's bilingual poem contains elements from Marot's French original and other lines allude to it, most of the French lines are inventions by De Dene or have possibly been taken from another poem. Not only does De Dene push the limits of decency in this song, he also walks the line between the French and Dutch languages.²⁷ Is this a Dutch poem that switches to French every other line, or a French poem that switches to Dutch?²⁸ In the context of the ongoing debates on the vernacular languages in which rules for language mixing were proposed, De Dene's bilingual poem raises questions on the compatibility of French and Dutch. It puts the differences between the two vernaculars and between their poetic rules into perspective.

The boundary between the two languages becomes increasingly vague in the second stanza quoted here. Until this stanza, it is rather clear that French and Dutch lines alternate regularly, but in line 28, a conflict appears with the term 'gracieux'. It seems to be a loanword from French, maintaining the original French spelling, using the final -x. It could also be a French word, however, meaning that the clear rule designating one language to each verse is being disrupted. The language switch would then no longer take place at the end of each verse: 'huers Lichaem' (Dutch); 'gracieux tristesse doeul' (French); 'verlough' (Dutch); 'victorieux nous feismes bonne chiere' (French); 'met herten' (Dutch); 'Coragieux' (French). The author has not visually distinguished the two languages from each other in the manuscript, so it remains unclear to the readers when he switches from one to the other. This is a question they will have to reflect on and answer for themselves.

De Dene playfully explores the Dutch vernacular through his poetic exercises. He is a paragon of the *homo ludens* [playful man], who maps and experiences the world through play.²⁹ In the early modern period, the practice of parlour games was a popular pastime in which philosophical, moral, and

²⁷ De Dene's decision to rework this song by Marot into an indecent one is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Marot's text has also been rewritten as a devotional song in the sixteenth century. Kate van Orden, 'Chanson and Air', in J. Haar (ed.), *European Music, 1520–1640* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 193–224, esp. 201–10.

²⁸ Not all stanzas start with a French verse. The first verse of the final stanza is in Dutch.

²⁹ Johan Huizinga, 'Homo ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur', in *Verzamelde werken*, Vol. 5 (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink en Zoon, 1950), 26–246, esp. 148–65, 212–3; Paula Findlen, 'Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge: The Playfulness of Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43 (1990), 292–331, esp. 293–5; Arjan van Dixhoorn, 'Nature, Play and the Middle Dutch Knowledge Community of Brussels in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', in B. Noak (ed.), *Wissenstransfer und Auctoritas in der frühneuzeitlichen niederländischsprachigen Literatur* (Göttingen: V & R uni-press, 2014), 99–122, esp. 99–103.

particularly language-related matters could be explored.³⁰ They playfully addressed topics that genuinely interested people at this time, and were as such part of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tradition of the *lusus serius* [serious game].³¹ Both on a morphological and on a syntax level, De Dene was playing a game of mixing and matching Dutch and French phonemes and words in order to obtain new creations. In doing so, he revealed the rules of the game he was playing. De Dene uncovered, in a sense, the morphological and syntactical rules of Dutch by contrasting and mixing it with French and by creating new words. In the way that children test limits, the poet was trying to see how far the Dutch language could stretch before its meaning collapsed. Like in any game, there is also a social aspect to De Dene's language games. His *Testament* only gives his own explorations, not the answers, and it thus incites readers to reflect on these language-related issues for themselves.

In *De Warachtighe fabulen der dieren*, too, De Dene incorporated many loan-words and thus played with the morphological boundaries between French and Dutch. Furthermore, he struggled with the poetic differences between the languages:

Zylt belieuen my in zommicht dich t'excuseren
t'Welck ick wel weet dat crepelt end'heldt
Want om diueersche taelen complaceren,
Heb ick naer haer manieren van spracken ghestelt:
Midts dat oock in een eyghen beweldt
d'Een tale met d'ander niet ouer eens blijcke:
Maer elck Landt (naer zijn tonghe) ghebruuct Rhetorijcke [...].³²

[Please excuse me for some poems,
of which I know that they limp and slant.
Because to please several languages,
I have written in their way of speaking,
But also in my own way,
one language is not the same as the other:
but every country (following its tongue) uses Rhetoric].

De Dene was not just interested in his Dutch mother tongue. He wanted to 'please several languages', but he knew that this was impossible because of the structural, but also poetic differences between them. Every country uses rhetoric – that is, every language has its laws. De Dene was strongly aware of the fact that each individual language had its own grammatical and poetic rules, and

³⁰ Mark A. Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Netherlandish Proverbs and the Practice of Rhetoric* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2002), 153–4; George McClure, *Parlour Games and the Public Life of Women in Renaissance Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Alisa van de Haar, 'Language Games: The Multilingual Emblem Book and the Language Question in the Low Countries', *Queeste*, 22 (2015), 82–109.

³¹ See, for example, Michael Maier, *Lusus serius, or, Serious passe-time a philosophicall discourse concerning the superiority of creatures under man* (Oppenheim: Luca Jennis, 1616).

³² Eduard de Dene, *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (Bruges: Pieter de Clerck, 1567), 218.

that there was some connection between the two. While translating the fables from French into Dutch, De Dene saw the differences in the way French and Dutch poetry was written. Corrozet had used isosyllabism, alternating feminine and masculine rhyme.³³ The use of isosyllabism was not common among Dutch rhetoricians, who practised non-isosyllabic verse forms, with varying numbers of syllables per line. De Dene opted for this style, writing verses of different lengths.

Matthijs de Castelein, too, was aware of the differences between French and Dutch poetry. De Castelein was the *factor* of the chambers of rhetoric *De Kersouwe* [The Daisy] and *Pax vobis* [Peace be with you] in his native city of Oudenaarde.³⁴ He had enjoyed a solid education, through which he had come into contact with the classics.³⁵ His most famous work is a treatise on the art of rhetoric in Dutch, *De const van rhetoriken*, published posthumously in 1555.³⁶ It focuses on the rules of poetry, such as rhyme schemes and verse forms. De Castelein was very interested in French poetry, which is demonstrated by the strong ties between *De const van rhetoriken* and a work on rhetoric and poetry by Jean Molinet. Nevertheless, he defined Dutch poetry as being fundamentally different from the traditions in the French language.³⁷ Other sources of inspiration are works by classical authors, such as Horace, Cicero, and Quintilian.³⁸ Among historians of the Dutch language, the *Const* is known mainly for its positive judgement on the use of loanwords. This has been considered a step backwards in the development of the language as moving towards purification and standardisation.³⁹

Like De Dene, De Castelein explored the borders between French and Dutch through his poetry, which was full of loanwords. He actively compared the poetic and grammatical differences between the two vernaculars and was able to determine which French poetic traditions were and which were not suitable for Dutch. He thus made an explicit remark about the existence of feminine and masculine rhyme in French:

[H]oe wel wijt ignoreren,
 Perfecte dictien, heeten zij masculijn,
 Ende de imperfecte feminijn,

³³ Gilles Corrozet, *Les fables d'Esopé phrygien* (Lyon: J. de Tournes & G. Gazeau, 1547).

³⁴ Bart Ramakers, *Spelen en figuren: Toneelkunst en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen Middeleeuwen en Moderne Tijd* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 126–7; idem, 'Between Aea and Golgotha: The Education and Scholarship of Matthijs De Castelein (c. 1485–1550)', in K. Goudriaan, J. van Moolenbroek, and A. Tervoort (eds.), *Education and Learning in the Netherlands, 1400–1600: Essays in Honour of Hilde de Ridder-Symoens* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 179–200, esp. 180.

³⁵ Ramakers, *Spelen en figuren*, 94, 127; idem, 'Between Aea and Golgotha'.

³⁶ Marijke Spies, 'Developments in Sixteenth-Century Dutch Poetics: From "Rhetoric" to "Renaissance"', in H. Plett (ed.), *Renaissance-Rhetorik – Renaissance Rhetoric* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 72–91, esp. 76–7.

³⁷ Dirk Coigneau, 'Matthijs de Castelein: "excellent poëte moderne"', *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 1985, 451–75, esp. 465–6.

³⁸ S. A. P. J. H. Iansen, *Verkenningen in Matthijs Casteleins Const van Rhetoriken* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971), 343–517; Coigneau, 'Matthijs de Castelein', 464–6.

³⁹ Van den Branden, *Het streven*, 32.

[...] Ic en siecht den vlamijnghen niet obserueren:
Elck land zal by zijn haude stilen blyuen.⁴⁰

[[E]ven though we ignore it,
they call perfect sentences masculine,
and imperfect ones feminine,
[...] I have not seen the Flemish consider it:
Every country will remain with its old style.]

Like De Dene, De Castelein states that every country, meaning every language, has its own laws and traditions, its own style or rhetoric. This was strongly connected, for them, with the nature of the language, which is why De Castelein must have thought these language-specific rules would not change. When discussing how to deal with the distribution of vowels over the verse, he stated: 'Dees const accordeert qualick metten wale,/Vvant elke tale heeft huer enargië' [This art does not agree well with Walloon [French],/because every language has its enargië].⁴¹ The term 'enargië' here is an early use in the vernacular of the Greek term *energeia*, which normally means force or action.⁴² De Castelein does not define what he means by this notion of 'enargië', but he seems to use it to refer to the special nature of the language.⁴³

FROM EXPLORING TO DEFINING

The rhetoricians did not stop after indicating that every language was different. They also tried to define the special characteristics of Dutch. De Castelein developed his understanding of the particular 'enargië' of each language by comparing Dutch and French metre.⁴⁴ In Dutch, he states, words only rhyme if the stress falls on the same syllable. This is not, however, the case in all languages:

Alder principaelst blijkt dit an de walen
Die tgoed dicht moeten halen an daccent zeer zoet,
In meest deel haer rethorike soen sy falen
Ten ware dat de enargie van haerlieder talen
Dit excuseerde, meer dant onslie doet [...].⁴⁵

[First and foremost, this is the case for the Walloons,
who have to make good poetry with a sweet accent.
In most of their rhetoric they would fail,

⁴⁰ Matthijs de Castelein, *De const van rhetoriken* (Ghent: Jan Cauweel, 1555), 37 (stanza 110).

⁴¹ De Castelein, *De const*, 37 (stanza 109).

⁴² Heinrich Plett, *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age: The Aesthetics of Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁴³ Iansen, *Verkenningen*, 118–9; Ramakers, 'As Many Lands', 143.

⁴⁴ Samuel Marcel, 'Rhetoricians and Their Classical and Foreign Contemporary Sources', in Bart Ramakers (ed.), *Understanding Art in Antwerp: Classicising the Popular, Popularising the Classic (1540–1580)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 255–60, esp. 256–7.

⁴⁵ De Castelein, *De const*, 45 (stanza 133).

if it were not that the enargie of their language,
allows this, more than ours does]

The special nature, or ‘enargië’, of French indeed gives this language a ‘sweet accent’ compared to Dutch, which has a much stronger natural word stress.⁴⁶ In isosyllabic French verse, the stress always falls on the final syllable, which constitutes the rhyme. Since the natural word stress is weak, the rhythm of the verse can cause the stress to fall on a syllable that is not naturally the strongest in the word. In French it is therefore possible, De Castelein explains, to create a rhyme pair out of two words in which the stressed syllable is not equal, which would be impossible in Dutch.

This linguistic difference created a problem for later Dutch poets, who wished to use the fashionable French metre in their mother tongue. It is generally assumed that the debates on these differences did not take place until the late sixteenth century, in the work of learned authors such as Daniel Heinsius and Petrus Scriverius, who promoted syllabo-tonic verse, which alternates stressed and unstressed syllables.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, De Castelein seems to have been aware of the differences already in 1548. His rejection of the ‘new’ French verse was not simplistic and old-fashioned, it was based on a profound awareness of the special character of his mother tongue that did not allow the application of the rules of French poetry.⁴⁸

A similar idea can be found in the *Twe-spraack*, where it is thus not as innovative as it might seem. This grammar compares the rules of Dutch and Latin poetry. Once more, it shows an interest in scholarly topics and the Latin language. Latin metre was based not on the number of accented syllables, but on the length of the syllables. The author of the *Twe-spraack* states, however, that in Dutch all syllables appear to be of equal length.⁴⁹ Therefore, ‘dunckt my, datmen meer na den aard van onze spraack, als na den voet der Latynisten moet te werck ghaan’ [I think, that we should proceed following rather the nature of our tongue, than following the feet of the Latinists].⁵⁰ By proposing to follow the poetic style that best suited the nature of the Dutch language, the author of

⁴⁶ The notions of softness and sweetness (‘douceur’) were often used in French treatises on language. See Mireille Huchon, ‘Le doux dans les rhétoriques et poétiques françaises du XVI^e siècle’, in M.-H. Prat and P. Servet (eds.), *Le ‘doux’ aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles: Écriture, esthétique, politique, spiritualité* (Lyon: Centre Jean Provost, 2003), 9–28.

⁴⁷ Leonard Forster, ‘Iets over Nederlandse renaissancecyriek vóór Heinsius en Hooft’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 83 (1967), 274–302, esp. 287; Werner Waterschoot, ‘Marot ou Ronsard?: New French Poetics Among Dutch Rhetoricians in the Second Half of the 16th Century’, in J. Koopmans (ed.), *Rhetoric – Rhétoriciens – Rederijkers* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1995), 141–56, esp. 152; Evgeny Kazartsev, ‘Nederlands en Duits versritme in de vroegmoderne tijd’, in *Neerlandistiek.nl* [online], 10 (2010): <http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/neerlandistiek/> (accessed February 2016); Prandoni, ‘Vive la France’, 192–3.

⁴⁸ See also Mareel, ‘Rhetoricians’; and Bart Ramakers, ‘Understanding Art in Antwerp. An Introduction’, in idem (ed.), *Understanding Art in Antwerp*, xi–xxii, esp. xxii.

⁴⁹ *Twe-spraack*, 56–7; Johan Koppenol, *Leids heelaal: Het Loterijspel (1596) van Jan van Hout* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), 180.

⁵⁰ *Twe-spraack*, 56.

the grammar actually suggested the exact same thing as De Castelein when he said that the French rules of poetry were not apt for the character of Dutch. In fact, De Castelein himself had already tried to apply Latin quantitative verse styles to Dutch.⁵¹ Nevertheless, a more regularised Dutch verse form, limiting the number of syllables, is supported in the *Twe-spraak*.⁵² While this standpoint has long been considered more modern than that of De Castelein, the reasoning behind their proposals is very similar. Both authors are equally interested in the special nature of the Dutch language. The *Twe-spraak* rejects, for this reason, loanwords, while De Castelein approves of carefully chosen loanwords and rejects the French rules of poetry.

Jan van Mussem studied various language phenomena in Dutch and discussed his observations in a prose treatise. He was chaplain in Wormhout, in Flanders, and was a member of the chamber *De Communicanten* [The Communion Receivers] in the same town.⁵³ He produced a text on the art of rhetoric entitled *Rhetorica, dye edele const van welsegghene*, which was published in Antwerp in 1553.⁵⁴ As mentioned on the title page, Van Mussem's text takes up many ideas from classical works by Cicero and Quintilian.⁵⁵ One of the phenomena studied by Van Mussem is the existence of onomatopoeia in the Dutch language – words that imitate a particular sound that is associated with whatever the word refers to⁵⁶:

Somtijts worden daer woorden ghemaect, near den voys oft gheluyt, als kaken, croggelen, buerlen, pijpen, alsoo segghen wij dat tgheschot afgaet, tijf, taf, touf [...] maer dit moet selden geschieden, anders soudē dye nyeuwe woorden verdrietelijck worden om te hooren.⁵⁷

[Sometimes words are created after a voice or sound, such as kakelen [cackling], croggelen, buerlen [belling?], pijpen [squeaking], and in the same manner we say that the shot is fired, tijf, taf, touf [...] but this should not happen too often, otherwise the new words would become dreary to hear.]

Van Mussem sees this device as a way to create neologisms, although it should not be applied too often. Van Mussem addresses a topic here that also recurred within the broader debates on language. For many students of language, such

⁵¹ De Castelein, *De const*, 226–7; S. Eringa, *La Renaissance et les rhétoriciens néerlandais: Matthieu de Casteleyn, Anna Bijns, Luc de Heere* (Amsterdam: Holland, 1920), 39–40; Koppenol, *Leids heellal*, 180, n. 369.

⁵² *Twe-spraak*, 57–8.

⁵³ Jan Vanderheyden, 'Jan van Mussem en de woordkunst: Kanttekeningen bij zijn *Rhetorica*', *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 1975, 281–93, esp. 289–90; Jan Vanderheyden, 'Taalbeheersing: Jan van Mussem en zijn *Rhetorica*', *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 1977, 55–72, esp. 57, 72.

⁵⁴ Spies, 'Developments', 75.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; Vanderheyden, 'Taalbeheersing'.

⁵⁶ Vanderheyden, 'Taalbeheersing', 66–7.

⁵⁷ Jan van Mussem, *Rhetorica dye edele const van welsegghene: Ghenomen uit de oude vermaerdtste rhetorisiēnen ende orateuren, als Cicero, Quintilianus, ende meer andere* (Antwerp: Hendrik Peetersen van Middelburgh, 1553), fol. H2v. For more information on these onomatopoeia, see Vanderheyden, 'Taalbeheersing', 67, n. 58–67.

as the humanists Abraham Mylius and Conrad Gessner, onomatopoeia were of special interest as possible indicators of the historic origins of the faculty of speech.⁵⁸

An aspect of the Dutch language that occupied both De Castelein and Van Mussem is proverbs. De Castelein mentions proverbs and adages as a suitable way to embellish poetry. He gives the examples 'Cocodrilsche tranen' [crocodile tears] and 'Blender dan een Mol' [blinder than a mole] and uses some proverbs in his stanzas.⁵⁹ Van Mussem, in his *Rhetorica*, uses proverbs more frequently.⁶⁰ He mentions them multiple times as being useful for the embellishment of a text or speech, and at one point he even gives a list of examples: 'Den wulf es in de schapen. Tes quaet stelen daer dye weerdt een dief es. Tes quaet voor crepels manck gaen' [There is a wolf among the sheep. It is hard to steal where the innkeeper is a thief. It is hard for the cripple to limp].⁶¹

In the early modern period, large numbers of collections of proverbs, maxims, and apothegms were published with such telling titles as *Thesaurus*, *Florilegium*, *Trésor*, and *Bouquet*. These textual productions were seen as 'treasure houses of language' and thus belong, together with the expanding tradition of dictionary-making, to the process of definition and exploration of the language and literary heritage of this period.⁶² Instead of *Wunderkammern*, these books were *Inventionskammern*, storing expressions of poetical invention and wisdom.⁶³ Many of those who studied the vernaculars were also paremiographers or gnomists. In France, the humanist printer Henri II Estienne inserted some 280 French proverbs and sayings to show off the richness of his language in the *Précellence du langage français* (1579). Proverbs played an important role in the study of the vernacular languages because some considered them to be particular to a specific language. Proverbs were, according to them, untranslatable, since a direct translation would not have the same meaning in another language.⁶⁴ Van Mussem and De Castelein do not reveal their opinion on this topic, but their interest in proverbs is definitely in line with later movements in the debates on the vernaculars.

⁵⁸ Marie-Luce Demonet-Launay, 'Les "incunables des langues" ou la place de l'onomatopée dans l'étymologie à la Renaissance, de Jean Chéradame à Etienne Pasquier', in C. Buridant (ed.), *L'étymologie de l'antiquité à la Renaissance* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998), 201–20; Van Hal, 'Moedertalen en taalmoeders', 226–7, 428, 441.

⁵⁹ De Castelein, *De const*, 239 (stanza 222); Jansen, *Verkenningen*, 124–7.

⁶⁰ Vanderheyden, 'Taalbeheersing', 60–5.

⁶¹ Van Mussem, *Rhetorica*, fol. H4r. For information about the meaning of these proverbs, see Vanderheyden, 'Taalbeheersing', 61, n. 32–6.

⁶² Meadow, *Pieter Bruegel*, 64–5; John Considine, *Dictionaries in Early Modern Europe: Lexicography and the Making of Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁶³ Heinrich Plett, 'Rhetorik der Renaissance – Renaissance der Rhetorik', in: H. Plett (ed.), *Renaissance-Rhetorik – Renaissance Rhetoric* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 1–20, esp. 11, 19.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the discussions on this subject in the preface and dedication of François Goedthals's collection of proverbs in French and Dutch, in which both Goedthals and the printer Christophe Plantin give their view on translating popular sayings. François Goedthals, *Les proverbes anciens flamengs et françois correspondants de sentence les uns aux autres* (Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1568).

In the light of the study of language undertaken by these rhetoricians, it is also interesting to note that both Van Mussem and De Dene make mention of thieves' cant. De Dene, who like his French example François Villon was no stranger to the criminal justice system, explains that telltales are called 'int Arragoens Cauwen' [jackdaws in Aragonese].⁶⁵ In medieval and early modern times, the term Aragonese was used to refer to criminal jargon.⁶⁶ Van Mussem accuses unlearned poets of turning their mother tongue into this language of thieves:

[...] dat si meer schijnen vreemde wtlandsche, wilde barbaren te wesen, dan ingheboren Vlamingen, oft dat si als dese boose blijters een arragoensch oft ghemaecte tale spreken willen, die niemant dan si selue verstaen en soude.⁶⁷

[...] they rather seem to be alien, foreign, wild barbarians, than native Flemish, or that they like these angry rascals, want to speak an Aragonese or artificial language, that no one but themselves would understand.]

The most important function of a vernacular language is to ensure clear communication between all of its speakers. According to Van Mussem, a careless use of new words and loanwords, caused by a lack of understanding of the language, its vocabulary, structure, and functioning, leads to a language that can only be understood by the poet. It thus loses its most important purpose, widespread communication, and becomes more like the artificial language of the underworld that is only understood by a select group of insiders.

CREATING A BETTER LANGUAGE

Although they did not write a prescriptive grammar of the Dutch language in the Latin tradition before 1584, rhetoricians did design ways to improve the vernacular throughout the century. The key issue was how to strengthen it as a means of communication, despite the fact that the poetry of the rhetoricians has often been accused of being hermetic. It is interesting to note that, contrary to De Castelein and De Dene, Van Mussem has been considered a visionary by modern researchers because of his opinion on loanwords.⁶⁸ In his rhetorical treatise, he criticised a bad use of borrowed terms. He expressed himself in harsh terms against his fellow rhetoricians who did not make good use of such words, calling them 'ongeleerde dichters [...] meynende Rhetorijcke te wesene een onuerstandele rijminghe, oft een const van veel segghene, ende nyet van wel segghene' [unlearned poets [...] who think that Rhetoric is

⁶⁵ De Dene, *Testament*, I, 101; Coigneau, 'Een Brugse Villon', 200; Paul Van Hauwermeiren, 'Bargoens, een "taal" met vele namen', *Taal en Tongval*, 56 (2004), 160–86, esp. 179.

⁶⁶ Herman Pleij, *Van schelmen en schavuiten: Laatmiddeleeuwse vagebondteksten* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1985), 116–7; Van Hauwermeiren, 'Bargoens', 173, 179.

⁶⁷ Van Mussem, *Rhetorica*, fol. C6r.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Marijke van der Wal, *De moedertaal centraal: Standaardisatie-aspecten in de Nederlanden omstreeks 1650* (The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers, 1995), 28.

unintellectual rhyming, or an art of speaking much rather than speaking well].⁶⁹ Van Mussem touches at the core of the matter here. Rather than criticising all rhetoricians, he targets the 'unlearned poets', that is, those who write in a language without having studied it and without understanding its characteristics, possibilities, and boundaries. For rhetoricians, the creation of poetry and the study of language could not do without each other. Through poetry, language and the process of meaning-making could be studied. On the other hand, without a thorough knowledge of the language, it was impossible to write good poetry.

Van Mussem did not reject the use of loanwords completely, but he warned of improper use. Loanwords could be adopted, but only when a Dutch word with a similar meaning did not yet exist, and only if the loanword was used with the right meaning and at the right place. Van Mussem added a 'vocabularius' or list of borrowed terms to his *Rhetorica* which looks like a purist vocabulary, but actually functions the other way around. The listed words are 'vreemde wtlantsche termen oft woorden, diemen onder ons Vlaemsche sprake dagelicx userende es' [alien, foreign terms or words that are used daily in our Flemish [Dutch] tongue].⁷⁰ These words do not need to be avoided. They can be used as long as everyone is aware of their precise meaning, which is why Van Mussem provides definitions. He even uses a great number of these words in his treatise himself, so that for a reedition in 1607, the printer wished to revise the text.⁷¹

What should be avoided, Van Mussem argues, is using these terms without understanding their meaning, and without understanding the way in which the Dutch language can incorporate them.⁷² The poet requires an awareness of the structure of the target language so he can decide how the word should be adapted. He should decide which verbal or nominal suffix needs to be added to integrate the word into the new language system. In the case of poetry, there is also the matter of stress and sound: how is the neologism pronounced, which syllable is stressed, and with which already existing words does it rhyme? Borrowing, indeed, was not a job for the poetically unlearned.

The poetic visions of Van Mussem and De Castelein were not far apart, even though it has been argued Van Mussem reacted against rhetoricians like De Castelein.⁷³ De Castelein was most certainly not an 'unlearned poet'. He pointed out the importance of learning in his treatise himself.⁷⁴ He did use loanwords, but he agreed with Van Mussem on the importance of knowing their exact meaning. It was for this reason that the rhetorician from Oude-naarde praised the study of languages: 'Maer die wel Latijn ende ander talen

⁶⁹ Van Mussem, *Rhetorica*, fol. A2v. See also Vanderheyden, 'Jan van Mussem en de woordkunst', 289–90.

⁷⁰ Van Mussem, *Rhetorica*, fol. K3r.

⁷¹ Jan Vanderheyden, 'De *Rhetorica* van Jan van Mussem', *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 1984, 1–73.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 51–3.

⁷³ Van den Branden, *Het streven*, 28.

⁷⁴ De Castelein, *De const*, 18 (stanza 52).

can/Heeft vijfthien vueren in elck ghespan,/Ende sal obtineren vanden sinen:/De ethymologie' [But who speaks Latin and other languages, unites fifteen fires, and will obtain etymology from them].⁷⁵ Learning multiple languages leads to a better understanding of the mother tongue because it provides insight into the etymology and thus meaning of many of its words. Moreover, if a poet wants to use loanwords to bring his poetry to a higher level of eloquence, he should fully understand the original meaning of the borrowed term. De Castelein warns for words that are 'quaed vlaemsch' [bad Flemish] that will 'bederfuen tdicht' [ruin the poem].⁷⁶ Thus, he, like Van Mussem, seems to be aware of the difficulties of borrowing terms and adapting them to a new language.

It becomes clear from the works of De Dene that the use of loanwords in itself was not an easy way of embellishing one's poetry, but that it was an appreciated skill that required a certain degree of learning. De Dene's learned treatment of loanwords is particularly visible in his emblematic fable book, which contains many borrowings from French. As has been demonstrated by Paul J. Smith, these loanwords have not been taken from Corrozet's French example, which was followed by De Dene.⁷⁷ In fact, they have been carefully invented by De Dene himself, and are not the product of a workshy translator, but of a very arduous one with a deep interest in both French and Dutch.

For all three rhetoricians discussed here, loanwords were a tool to render the Dutch tongue more apt to express complex matter and to rival Latin as a language of poetry. De Castelein's call to use borrowings was a well-considered decision based on the state of the Dutch language. In order to write poetry in Dutch, it was necessary to follow the example of Latin rhetoric and implement 'Ornatien, Exemplen, tschuwen der Vitien,/Couuere van worden, Amplificatien,/Schoon Sententien, Conclusien, Imitatien' ['ornations', examples, avoiding the vices,/plenitude of words, amplification,/beautiful sententiae, conclusions and imitations].⁷⁸ The Oudenaarde poet refers to the notion of *ornatus*, the richness of the vocabulary of a language that allowed poetry to become eloquent. An ornate language would allow the poet to express a single idea in multiple ways, answering to the ideal of *copia*.⁷⁹

In his treatise, Van Mussem states that 'wij al ons leuen lanck, ons eyghen moeder tale te rechte nyet spellen, lesen, spreken noch verstaen en konnen' [we, for our entire lives, have not spelled, read, or spoken our own mother tongue right].⁸⁰ Here he touches upon another aspect of the Dutch language that was addressed by both himself and De Castelein and by the *Twe-spraak*:

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 33 (stanza 98).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 40 (stanza 118).

⁷⁷ Smith, 'Plurilinguisme'.

⁷⁸ De Castelein, *De const*, 19 (stanza 55).

⁷⁹ Ramakers, 'As Many Lands', 146; Van Dixhoorn, 'The Multilingualism', 52.

⁸⁰ Van Mussem, *Rhetorica*, fol. A2v.

orthography.⁸¹ Van Mussem repeatedly stresses the importance of studying the Dutch tongue and learning its grammar, by which he means: 'die const van een goede suyuer tale, tsi vlaemsche oft andere, wel ende perfectelijc te kunnen spellen scrijuen, lesen, spreken ende verstaen, sonder twelcke tot die edele Rhetorijcke nyemant bequame wesen en mach' [the art of a good, pure language, either Flemish or another, to be able to spell and write, read, speak, and understand well and perfectly, without which no one can be accomplished in the noble art of rhetoric].⁸² Orthography receives special attention, and Van Mussem warns that poets should 'die woorden niet corrupere int spellen noch pronuncieren' [not corrupt the words in spelling or in pronunciation].⁸³

De Castelein's chamber of rhetoric *De Kersouwe* was one of the first chambers to stipulate in its regulations that members should pay attention to orthography.⁸⁴ De Castelein himself was clearly aware of the problems caused by bad spelling: 'Qualick spellen (dat en magh niet lieghen)/Maeckt zulck erruer op dland ende ind sté' [Bad spelling (I cannot lie),/causes such mistakes in the countryside and in the cities].⁸⁵ Poets had to be extra careful, according to De Castelein, and should be well aware of the differences that sometimes existed between orthography and pronunciation. He gives examples of words that look similar on paper but are different when read aloud: 'Als speld ghyse ghelijc, de rethorike es quaed' [Even though they are spelled the same, the rhetoric is bad].⁸⁶ Here he tackles the problem of homographs. He demonstrates the necessity of the study of orthography and of the connection between spelling and pronunciation. Interestingly, at the time when De Castelein wrote his *Const*, a vivid debate was taking place in France on the use of phonetic orthography versus the use of etymological orthography.⁸⁷ The *Twe-spraak*, too, showed particular interest in orthography. It proposed a new spelling, because 'een ghoede eenpaartighe spelling, als een grondvest is van een welgheboude spraack' [a good, uniform spelling, is like the foundation of a well-built speech].⁸⁸

Although Van Mussem did not publish a treatise on grammar, he did emphasise the importance of grammatical correctness in his *Rhetorica*.⁸⁹ The rules of the Dutch language had not yet been formulated explicitly, but Van Mussem was already aware of them. Breaking these rules would lead to 'quade ongheseerde tale' [bad uncommon language], which was used by unlearned poets who had not studied the language. Van Mussem presents the following

⁸¹ Jeroen Vandommele, *Als in een spiegel: Vrede, kennis en gemeenschap op het Antwerpse Landjuweel van 1561* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2011), 215–6.

⁸² Van Mussem, *Rhetorica*, fol. A2v.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, fol. G3r. See also his warning for 'qualijck spellen' [spelling badly] on fol. K4r.

⁸⁴ Ramakers, *Spelen en figuren*, 119.

⁸⁵ De Castelein, *De const*, 42 (stanza 125).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 43 (stanza 127).

⁸⁷ Nina Catach, *L'orthographe française à l'époque de la Renaissance (Auteurs–Imprimeurs–Ateliers d'imprimerie)* (Geneva: Droz, 1962); Susan Baddeley, *L'orthographe française au temps de la Réforme* (Geneva: Droz, 1993).

⁸⁸ *Twe-spraak*, fol. A4r. See also Dibbets, *Twe-spraak*, 32–4.

⁸⁹ Vanderheyden, 'Jan van Mussem en de woordkunst', 290.

examples: 'Wij gaet, hy loopen. Tes goet dat wij ongehuwet zijn blijuen also ons Paulus wel es beschrijuen, etc. Men moet seggen blijuende, beschrijuende' [We goes, he walk. It is good that we are remain unmarried, like Paul is rightly write, etc. You should say remaining and writing].⁹⁰ The grammatical errors pointed out by Van Mussem concern the verbs. In the first sentence, they have been used in the wrong person; in the second, they have been set in the infinitive instead of the conjugated form.

CONCLUSION

Long before *De Eglantier* decided to create a Dutch *trivium* in the 1580s, rhetoricians were studying and exploring the Dutch language through their poetry in order to improve their poetic output. By contrasting their mother tongue, an example of *ingenium*, with French and occasionally Latin, they came to understand its nature, and studied and cultivated it as an *ars*. According to authors such as De Castelein and Van Mussem, a good poet was a learned poet. Without a thorough knowledge of the poetical and grammatical rules of the language, it was impossible to create a true rhetoricians' text. Rhetoricians had to be aware of the boundaries of the language, of what was possible in Dutch and what was not, and should thus explore the differences between French and Dutch and the special characteristics of their mother tongue. It was clear for the poets studied here that there was a strong connection between poetic rules and the form, nature, and structure of the language, which is why poetic traditions connected to other languages were not always considered to be compatible with their vernacular.

Through their explorations, these rhetoricians came across many of the language phenomena that interested humanists working on language as well, such as onomatopoeia, proverbs, and matters of metre. Moreover, the writings of De Castelein and Van Mussem were rooted firmly in the classical texts by Cicero, Quintilian, and others that also stimulated the debates in scholarly environments. They were interested in the same topics as the poets of *De Eglantier* and the scholarly milieu with which the Amsterdam rhetoricians wished to engage. The ideas put forward by De Castelein, De Dene, and Van Mussem were based on empirical study of the Dutch language, but they often differed from what was proposed by the *Twe-spraack*. Their argumentation was just as sophisticated as that of the members of *De Eglantier*, who have been considered more important for the development of Dutch. On the topic of loanwords, it seems that *De Eglantier* even drew the short straw: in everyday speech, the Dutch vernacular would never become fully purified.

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⁹⁰ Van Mussem, *Rhetorica*, fol. G1r.